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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 002001

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER
LONDON FOR GURNEY
PARIS FOR NEARY
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2012
TAGS: PHUM ZI
SUBJECT: LEADING HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST ARRESTED

REF: HARARE 1984

Classified By: political section chief Matt Harrington. Reasons: 1.5 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) On August 29, police detained Frances Lovemore, acting director of Zimbabwe's leading human rights organization, Amani Trust. She was charged with violating the section of the repressive Public Order and Security Act (POSA) which prohibits publication of "falsehoods" prejudicial to the state. After questioning her at the Harare Central Police Station in the company of a lawyer, police bundled her into a vehicle and took her to an undisclosed location. She was detained incommunicado overnight, and her attorneys were not provided access to her until late in the morning on August 30, after the Attorney-General's office intervened at the behest of her lawyer.

¶2. (C) The saga began in the morning of August 29, when police detectives appeared at the offices of Amani Trust with a warrant authorizing a search for "subversive materials" in Lovemore's possession. Police searched her office and confiscated a report from Amnesty International, a copy of the UN Convention Against Torture, and a number of political violence reports produced regularly by the UN Human Rights NGO Forum. Lovemore was then taken to Harare Central Police station, where she was questioned about international media reports quoting Lovemore as saying rape was being used by ZANU-PF youth militias as a political weapon. The group then returned to conduct a wider search of Amani's offices (ignoring the restrictions in the search warrant), and returned to the police station. Lovemore was asked to sign a "warned and cautioned" statement, then was formally charged under POSA.

¶3. (C) Lovemore is expected to appear in court for a bail hearing on the morning of August 30, and the Attorney-General's office has told her attorney it will not oppose the granting of bail. One of her attorneys told us that Lovemore appeared physically okay after her overnight detention, but was hungry because she had been provided no food during the previous 24 hours. In addition, she had spent a very cold night in the cell, as she had not been given a blanket or the opportunity to obtain clothing warmer than the light dress she was wearing at the time of her arrest.

Comment

¶4. (C) Lovemore's arrest came only several hours after the bombing of the office of an independent radio station (reftel), so it was not a good day for freedom of speech in Zimbabwe. Lovemore told us earlier in the week she was alarmed by a significant increase in the numbers of apparently politically-motivated rapes reported to her office, and she has worked hard to publicize this troubling development. The Government of Zimbabwe has grown increasingly annoyed by the international media's focus on this issue, and it clearly blames Lovemore. Although Jonathan Moyo and his propaganda machine have, in the past, leveled all sorts of venomous attacks against Amani Trust, this time the GOZ has upped the ante. The outrageous treatment of Lovemore appears to be a shot across the bow for other human rights and civic organizations, and we suspect that a GOZ crackdown against other segments of civil society is not far off.

SULLIVAN